

# Articles

## Sir William Macewen's Visit to California as the First Lane Medical Lecturer A Centennial Celebration

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1996 marked the centennial anniversary of the 1896 visit to California of William Macewen, MD, Regius Professor of Surgery of the University of Glasgow, Scotland, to give the first Lane Medical Lectures. I describe the origins of this historic lecture series and include photographic records. The progress and development of modern California medicine have been greatly influenced by the personalities who initiated and nurtured this lecture series.

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*Bring me men to match my mountains . . .*

SAM FOSS  
*The Coming American<sup>1</sup>*

As the 19th century drew to a close, California symbolized for many Americans a century of spectacular achievements. The discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill in 1848 spurred the immigration of the first wave of adventurers to the area, bringing statehood in 1850, while the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 over the Sierra Nevadas resulted in a rapid increase in population and commerce from the East.<sup>2,3</sup> When Levi Cooper Lane, MD, foremost surgeon of the Pacific Coast, founded Cooper Medical College in 1882, the state's growing sophistication became clear.<sup>4</sup>

National acknowledgment of the West Coast's importance in health care came in 1895 with the election to the presidency of the American Medical Association of Richard Beverly Cole, MD, San Francisco obstetrician and University of California professor.<sup>5</sup> Elated by the new medical prominence of California, by his school's accomplishments, and by the opening of his new Lane Hospital in San Francisco early in 1896, Professor Lane decided to endow a lecture series to commemorate these events. He hoped that by bringing the medical profession of the Far West into closer contact with the more progressive medical minds in the East and in Europe, the lectures would foster an intellectual culture and encourage scientific research.<sup>6</sup>

In the spring of 1895, Lane sent for Adolph Barkan, MD, Professor of Ophthalmology and Otology at Cooper Medical College, who was about to leave for a European tour, and told him of his plan to establish the lecture series. Discussing the choice of an inaugural

speaker, the two physicians decided almost immediately on Professor William Macewen of the University of Glasgow, Scotland. Lane asked Barkan to deliver his invitation personally.

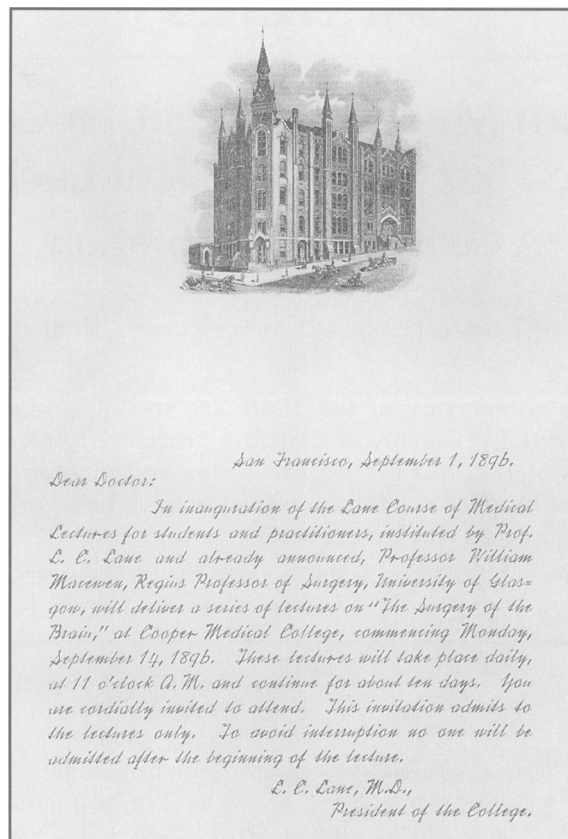
It had not been difficult to select Macewen, who, at the pinnacle of his career, was one of Europe's leading surgeons. Appointed Regius Professor in 1892, the 48-year-old Scottish surgeon had either pioneered or formulated major advances in aseptic surgery, tracheal intubation, herniorrhaphy, and orthopedics.<sup>7</sup> He performed the first complete pneumonectomy for tuberculosis immediately before Barkan's visit in April of 1895.

Macewen's accomplishments in cerebral surgery and the surgical treatment of mastoiditis were also well known. Barkan, an otologist, and Lane, the first surgeon in America to relieve a case of microcephalus by craniectomy and author of a new text on head and neck surgery, were confident that they had chosen wisely.<sup>8,9</sup>

Cabling Macewen in Glasgow, Lane extended his invitation and arranged for Barkan and Professor Macewen to meet in London on the evening before Macewen's address to the British Medical Association on the subject of brain surgery.<sup>10</sup> Macewen became enthralled with the idea of visiting the American West and of seeing California, a land of promise, hope, and dreams for many Europeans. He declined the honorarium suggested by Lane of \$2,000—a princely sum in 1896, about equal to the annual salaries of the noted University of California professors Joseph LeConte, MD, and Eugene Hilgard, MD, and twice the salary of the first full-time Cooper College professor appointed in 1898, William Ophuls, MD, Professor of Pathology<sup>11</sup>—remarking, "The fee does not tempt me, but I like the idea."<sup>16(p603)</sup>

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**Figure 1.**—A formal invitation was sent to physicians to attend the first Lane Medical Lecture, with an engraving of Cooper Medical College.

Before Macewen could accept the offer, however, he had to secure approval from the royal family to absent himself from his role as surgeon to the King of England. Having settled this issue, Macewen formally accepted the invitation to deliver the first course in the Lane Medical Lectures in San Francisco, California, from September 14 to 25, 1896 (Figure 1).

### First Lane Medical Lecture

Macewen embarked for San Francisco in early September of 1896, traveling across Canada on the newly inaugurated Canada-Pacific railroad to Oakland, California, where he was met by Cooper College professors (Figure 2). They took Macewen on a brief tour, welcoming him to the San Francisco Bay Area and the University of California. There he met with Professor William Ritter of the Department of Zoology, who was studying a topic of great interest to Macewen—changes in the bronchial epithelium of the newt as it changed its habitat from land to water.<sup>12</sup>

In his lectures, Macewen described the contemporary clinical diagnosis and operative treatment of brain trauma, brain abscess, and cerebral tumors, leading the audience on a didactic tour de force of work he pioneered in conjunction with Paul Broca, MD, William Ferrier, MD, J. Hughlings Jackson, MD, and Jean Charcot, MD.<sup>13-16</sup> He showed many plates from his *Topographical Atlas of*

*the Brain*.<sup>17</sup> Transcripts of the complete lectures were eventually published in *Occidental Medical Times*.<sup>18</sup>

An estimated 700 or more physicians and students of Cooper Medical College crowded the hall for each of the lectures. Lane, who realized the historic significance of the occasion for the student body, arranged for each student to have a card signed by Macewen verifying his or her attendance. Macewen also generously performed two operations for the benefit of the students, an osteotomy for genu valgum and a radical mastoidectomy with Drs Stillman and Rixford assisting.

During a sumptuous banquet given in Macewen's honor, Edward Robeson Taylor, MD, Cooper College's Vice-President and eclectic lawyer-physician-poet, read an ode to Macewen, extolling his feats of cerebral surgery<sup>19,20</sup>:

Even cranial walls oppose in vain:  
For breaking through,  
You seize the demons of the brain,  
By faultless clew,  
And set their tortured victims free,  
That life and joy again may be.

Reluctant to be photographed, Macewen nevertheless agreed to pose with Drs Lane, Barkan, Hirschfelder (Cooper professor responsible for America's first surgical treatment of primary brain tumor),<sup>21</sup> and Stillman



**Figure 2.**—Professor William Macewen was photographed on September 20, 1896, during a tour of the San Francisco Bay Area. Adolph Barkan, MD, was driving the buggy and Thomas Stillman, MD, was seated on the horse.

(responsible for an early 1894 series of laminectomies in California)<sup>22</sup> (Figure 3).

To express the school's gratitude, Lane chose Ray Lyman Wilbur, a young medical student who later became Dean of the Stanford Medical School, President of Stanford University Medical School, President of the American Medical Association, Secretary of the Interior under President Herbert Hoover, and one of the great men in American medicine.<sup>23</sup> As an aside, his son, Dwight Wilbur, MD, carried on this legacy of service as Editor of *The Western Journal of Medicine* from 1946 to 1966 and, like his father, was President of the American Medical Association in 1967.<sup>24</sup>

On October 2, 1896, the Lane Hospital's Board of Directors, honoring Professor Macewen for the success of the first Lane Medical Lectures, noted that Lane had personally commended him for his gracious personality and his inspiration to California's medical profession.

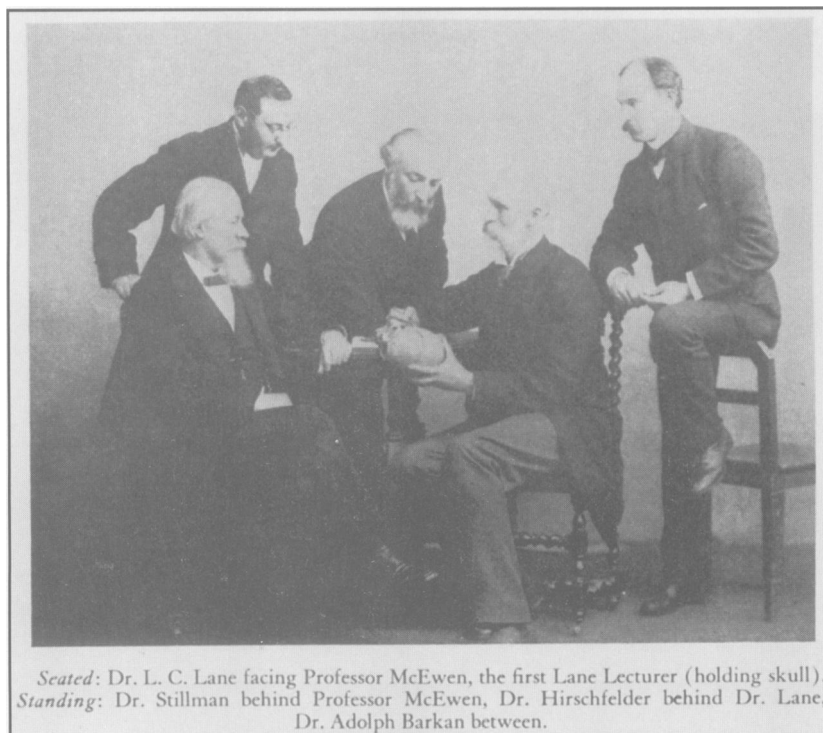
### Aftermath

In subsequent Lane lectures, distinguished names in medicine and surgery continued in Macewen's footsteps. Among them were Sir Thomas Allbutt, Regius Professor of the University of Cambridge, England; Nicolas Senn, MD, Professor of Surgery, Rush Medical College (Chicago, Illinois); William Welch, MD, Professor of Pathology, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine (Baltimore, Maryland); Reginald Fitz, MD, Professor of

Medicine, Harvard Medical School (Boston, Massachusetts); and Simon Flexner, MD, Director of Laboratories, Institute for Medical Research (New York City). For many years, Macewen assisted Lane in appointing lecturers. As evidence of the care with which Lane selected his speakers and the quality of his advice, most of the British lecturers chosen subsequently received knighthood for their service to medical science. It was fitting that in 1947, the golden anniversary of the Lane Lectures initiated by Professor Macewen, another great surgical neurologist, Wilder Penfield, MD, Director of the Montreal Neurological Institute of McGill University Faculty of Medicine, gave the lecture, "Physiological Observations of the Cerebral Cortex of Man." The Lane Medical Lectures continue to draw eminent medical scientists from around the world to teach and inspire.<sup>25</sup>

Dr Levi Cooper Lane died on February 18, 1902. Appropriately, when Cooper Medical College became part of Stanford University in 1909, Lane, so intimate with the heritage, traditions, and languages of the Old World, and Leland Stanford, whose railroad more closely bound the Old World and California, posthumously shared credit for this legacy.

The story has a brief postscript. While on his journey in 1923 as the British Medical Association's "ambassador" to the Australasian Medical Association, Macewen, now on his second visit to California, was



**Figure 3.**—This group photograph was taken of L. C. Lane, MD, Professor William Macewen, and Cooper Medical College physicians.

taken on a tour of Sequoia National Park by Dr Emmet Rixford. After spending the day wandering among the giant trees, the old surgeon turned to his guide and said, "Rixford, this is the greatest thing I have ever seen."<sup>26</sup> Thus was paid any lingering debt of the California medical profession to Macewen for his magnificent lectures 27 years earlier. A year later, on March 22, 1924, Macewen died of cardiac failure complicating a severe bout of pneumonia.<sup>27</sup>

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